

and to support and pray for you in your task of bringing up your child in the Christian faith. We are here to help you. Please stay in touch.

After the Baptism Service you will receive a Certificate of Baptism which you should keep in a safe place as there may be some future occasions when the certificate may need to be produced.



Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. We hope it has been helpful and we look forward to talking with you. There are a wide range of resources available which try to help parents and young children understand the meaning and significance of baptism. Please ask the minister who visits you for details.

The clergy can be contacted as below:

Rev Canon David Ainge: 01371 872504
Rev Canon Rosemary Drew: 01371 872662
Rev Mark James: 01371 859229

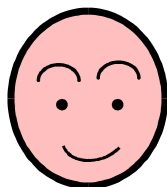
*St Mary's Great Dunmow and
St Andrew's Barnston*

Information and Guidance for Families Considering Baptism



Welcome....

Thank you for enquiring about the possibility of having your child baptized in church. In doing so you have placed yourself in a minority group of parents who think that baptism is an important step in their child's life. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you and we hope this booklet will help that discussion. The booklet explains a little bit about what baptism will mean for you and your child and your future together and how the procedure for baptism works here in these parishes. Incidentally, the terms '*christening*' and '*baptism*' mean pretty much the same thing. Because the Bible uses the term '*baptism*' we will be using that term throughout this booklet.



The Service of Thanksgiving



We trust that the birth of your baby was trouble free and that both mother and baby are healthy and doing well. The first thing that you as parents may want to do publicly, is to thank God for the safe delivery of your baby and for the good health of both mother and child. In the old days, when childbirth was a very risky and dangerous business and many mothers and babies did not survive the process (days that are now largely gone), the first thing that a family would do after the birth was to go to church and to thank God for the safe delivery and the good health of both mother and child. This service was called the 'Churching of Women'. A version of this service is still available today. It is called a 'Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of A Child'. Here in Dunmow and Barnston we offer this



the first or the third Sundays in the month (but not both). The minister will be able to tell you which Sunday is scheduled for baptisms in a particular month. The first Sunday in the month is a shorter form of the Holy Communion Service. The third Sunday in the month is an All Age Family Service.

Godparents

A child being baptized normally has three godparents, two of the same sex as the child and one of the opposite sex. The laws which govern the Church of England state that Godparents must themselves have been baptized. If you think this could present problems you should discuss this at the meeting with the minister.

After the Baptism

It is important to stress that the process does not finish once the Baptism Service has taken place. You will be encouraged to come to church as a family as often as you can. We will attempt as far as we can to provide church services and facilities which are child friendly. Every Sunday children up to the age of eleven can attend teaching groups which take place during part of the main 10.30 morning service. The third Sunday of the month is an All Age service where families worship together for the whole service. There will also be occasional services such as the Christingle Service and Crib Service which are ideal occasions for families with young children to come to church together. We also run a Pram Service and mums and toddlers group on a Wednesday morning during the school term. The church will try to keep in touch with you



A Summary of the Process

The fact that you have been reading this booklet probably means that you have already contacted the church to discuss your child's baptism. Once you have read the booklet you will need to contact the church again. One of the ministers of the church will then arrange a time when they can come round to your home (or you may prefer to visit them) to meet and get to know you and your child, to discuss the contents of the booklet and maybe to arrange a date for the Service of Thanksgiving. This short service can take place on *any* Sunday immediately after the main church service has finished.



Once the Service of Thanksgiving has taken place, the minister will visit you again to discuss the nature and meaning of the Baptism Service. It is important to be aware that there is absolutely no time limit on when a baptism can take place. You should take as long as you want to decide if this is what you want to do. It is far better to decide not to go ahead than to make promises in public and before God that you know you will not be able to keep. If you and the minister mutually agree that Baptism is the appropriate next step then the arrangements for the service can be put in place.



The Date

Baptisms take place during the normal 10.30 am morning service at church. It is quite possible that other families may be bringing their children for baptism on the same day as you. Baptisms take place once per month on *either*

service to all parents who approach us about baptism. It is a very short and simple service which can take place on any Sunday immediately after the morning service in church. There are no godparents, promises or water - in other words it is *not* a baptism service. Relatives and friends of the family are more than welcome to attend the service. Many parents have valued and appreciated this service and have also seen it as a helpful first step towards considering baptism for their child. Some parents, however, decide at this point that the Service of Thanksgiving has fully met their desires and expectations and they decide not to proceed to baptism with the level of Christian commitment that is involved.



The Baptism Service

Following on from the Service of Thanksgiving, you may want to proceed to having your child baptized in church. Baptisms always takes place during the main morning service in church and parents and godparents are required to do two things. Firstly they make promises about how they will ensure that the child is brought up within the Christian faith. Secondly they make statements about their own faith in God. All of this is done in public and before God so it is a very serious and significant occasion in the life of a family. Whilst we would always encourage parents to consider baptism for their child we believe it should not be entered into lightly. It is unwise to make promises that we know we are either unable or unwilling to fulfil.

So what is baptism and why is it such a serious commitment? Well, the use of water in the baptism service helps us to understand its meaning and significance.

Water is associated with washing. Most of us would admit that we fall short of God's standards for living - let alone our own. We do, say and think things that we wish we didn't and we feel sorry about. It's amazing that from a very early age we can see those same traits in our children! In the water of baptism we acknowledge our wrongdoing (which Christians call 'sin') and our need for cleansing. At one point in the service the minister will make the sign of the cross on the child's forehead reminding us of Christ's death on the cross which is the reason our sins can be forgiven.



It's also possible of course to drown in water! Don't worry, this won't happen at your child's baptism! In the days of Jesus in the warm climate of the Holy Land people were baptized outdoors in the open water of the sea, lakes or rivers. They went down into the water symbolizing an end to their old way of life. The coming up out of the water symbolized the start of a new life following in the footsteps of Jesus



Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit. So in the water of baptism we acknowledge our intention to live a new life. During the Baptism service the family will be presented with a lighted candle representing the light of Christ which will be a guide on the journey.

Most importantly baptism signifies 'belonging'. The Bible

talks of us being 'baptized into Christ'. When we are baptized it is a public acknowledgement that we are now part of the worldwide family of God. The church here in Dunmow and Barnston is a small part of that large family. Being part of our local church allows us to receive the support and encouragement we need to live the Christian life.



Now obviously young children cannot understand all of these things, so why baptize them? Well, we do this because parents and godparents promise that with God's help they will do all they can to ensure that young children receive a Christian upbringing and will in time come to understand and experience these things for themselves. This will involve attending church together as a family as often as possible and praying and reading the Bible together.

So having explained briefly what baptism is, it may also be helpful at this point to say what it is *not*:

- It is *not* a ceremony to name the child
- It is *not* a social convention to get the family together to celebrate the birth of a child
- It *does not* automatically make the child a Christian
- It is *not* a cast iron guarantee that the child will have a happy and trouble free life
- It is *not* a requirement for a future church wedding

But the most important positive thing to remember is that Baptism marks the *beginning* of a journey with God that parents and child will make *together*.

